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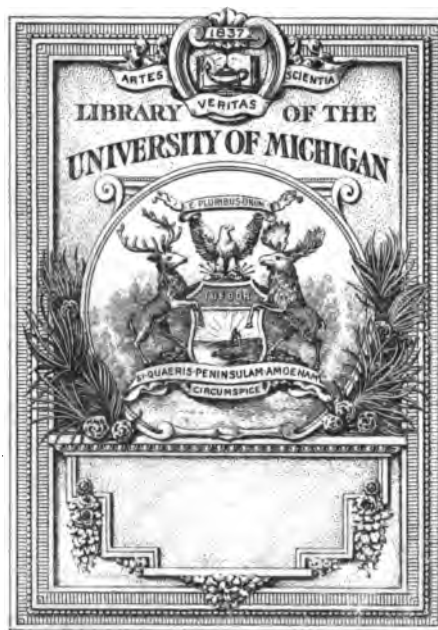
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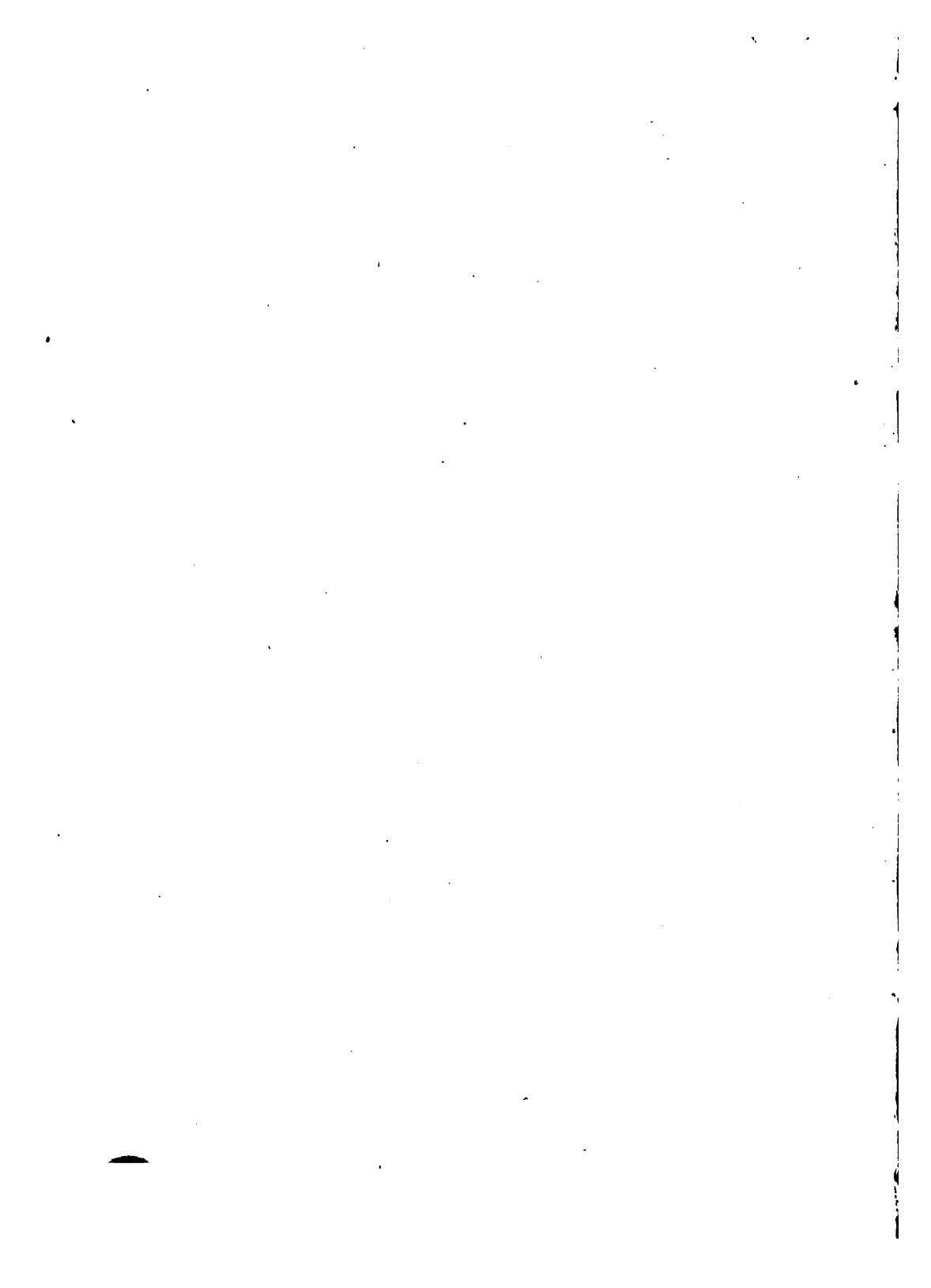
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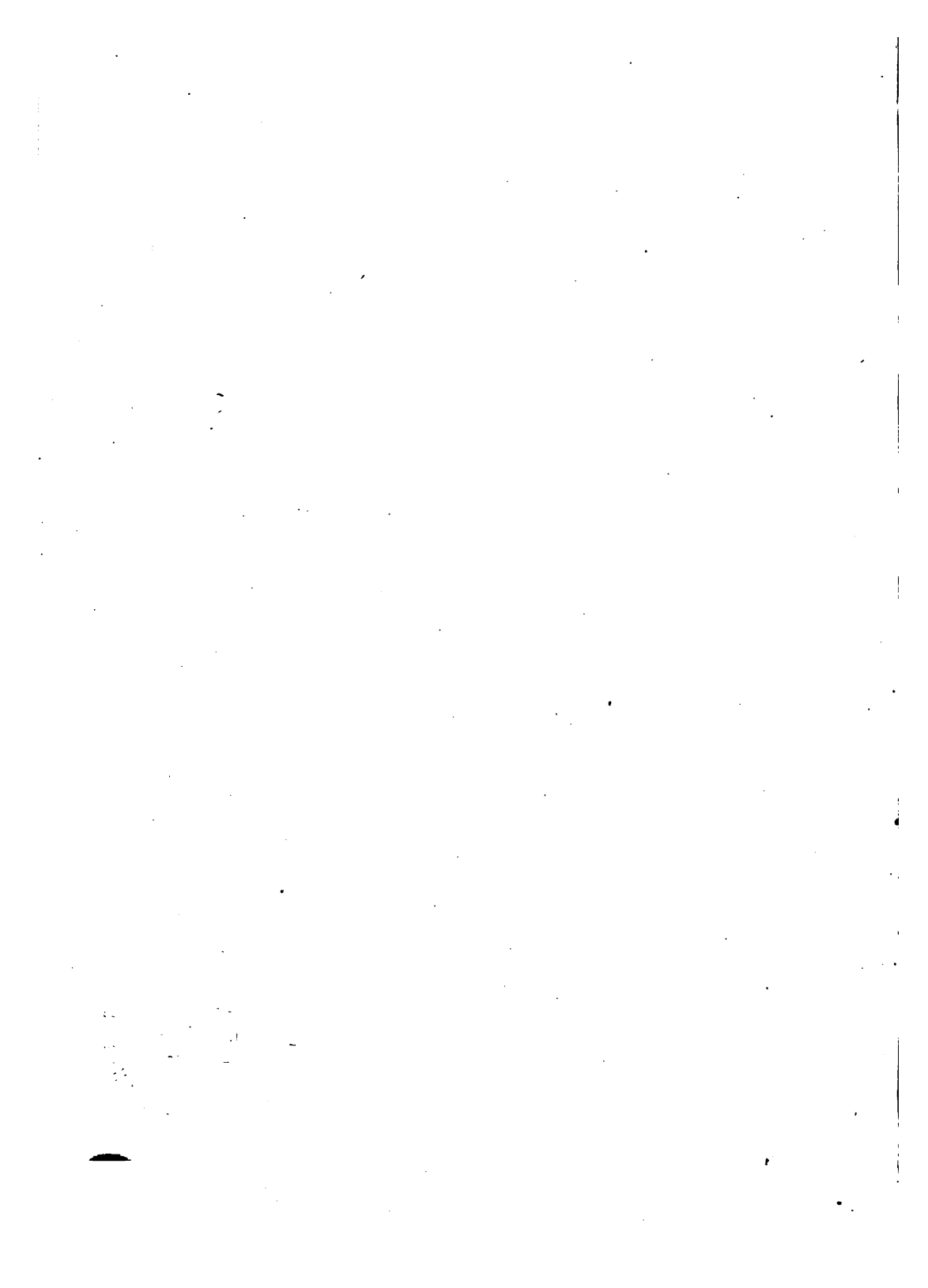


# A COLLEGE FETICH.

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CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, JR.







20858

*A COLLEGE FETICH.*

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

*The Harvard Chapter*

OF THE

FRATERNITY OF THE PHI BETA KAPPA,

*IN SANDERS THEATRE, CAMBRIDGE,*

JUNE 28, 1883.

By CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, JR.

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## ADDRESS.

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I AM here to-day for a purpose. After no little hesitation I accepted the invitation to address your Society, simply because I had something which I much wanted to say; and this seemed to me the best possible place, and this the most appropriate occasion, for saying it. My message, if such I may venture to call it, is in nowise sensational. On the contrary, it partakes, I fear, rather of the commonplace. Such being the case, I shall give it the most direct utterance of which I am capable.

Re-classed 7-5-30 A: M

It is twenty-seven years since the class of which I was a member was graduated from this college. To-day I have come back here to take, for the first time, an active part of any prominence in the exercises of its Commencement week. I have come back, as what we are pleased to term an educated man, to speak to educated men; a literary man, as literary men go, I have undertaken to address a literary society; a man who has, in any event, led an active, changeable, bustling life, I am to say what I have to say to men, not all of whom have led similar lives. It is easy to imagine one who had contended in the classic games returning, after they were over, to the gymnasium in which he had been trained. It would not greatly matter whether he had acquitted himself well or ill in the arena, — whether he had come back crowned with vic-

tory or broken by defeat: in the full light of his experience of the struggle, he would be disposed to look over the old paraphernalia, and recall the familiar exercises, passing judgment upon them. Tested by hard, actual results, was the theory of his training correct; were the appliances of the gymnasium good; did what he got there contribute to his victory, or had it led to his defeat? Taken altogether, was he strengthened, or had he been emasculated by his gymnasium course? The college was our gymnasium. It is now the gymnasium of our children. Thirty years after graduation a man has either won or lost the game. Winner or loser, looking back through the medium of that thirty years of hard experience, how do we see the college now?

It would be strange, indeed, if from this point of view we regarded it, its theories and its methods, with either unmixed approval or unmixed condemnation. I cannot deny that the Cambridge of the sixth decennium of the century, as Thackeray would have phrased it, was in many respects a pleasant place. There were good things about it. By the student who understood himself, and knew what he wanted, much might here be learned; while for most of us the requirements were not excessive. We of the average majority did not understand ourselves, or know what we wanted: the average man of the majority rarely does. And so for us the college course, instead of being a time of preparation for the hard work of life, was a pleasant sort of vacation rather, before that work began. We so regarded it. I should be very sorry not to have enjoyed that vacation. I am glad that I came here, and glad that I took my degree. But as a training-place for youth to enable them to engage to advantage in the struggle of life, — to fit them to hold their own in it, and to carry off the prizes, — I must in all honesty say, that, looking back through the years, and recalling the requirements and methods of the ancient institution, I am unable to speak of it with all the respect I could wish. Such training as I got, useful for the

struggle, I got after, instead of before graduation, and it came hard; while I never have been able — and now, no matter how long I may live, I never shall be able — to overcome some great disadvantages which the superstitions and wrong theories and worse practices of my *Alma Mater* inflicted upon me. And not on me alone. The same may be said of my contemporaries, as I have observed them in success and failure. What was true in this respect of the college of thirty years ago is, I apprehend, at least partially true of the college of to-day; and it is true not only of Cambridge, but of other colleges, and of them quite as much as of Cambridge. They fail properly to fit their graduates for the work they have to do in the life that awaits them.

This is harsh language to apply to one's nursing mother, and it calls for an explanation. That explanation I shall now try to give. I have said that the college of thirty years ago did not fit its graduates for the work they had to do in the actual life which awaited them. Let us consider for a moment what that life has been, and then we will pass to the preparation we received for it. When the men of my time graduated, Franklin Pierce was President, the war in the Crimea was just over, and three years were yet to pass before Solferino would be fought. No united Germany and no united Italy existed. The railroad and the telegraph were in their infancy; neither nitro-glycerine nor the telephone had been discovered. The years since then have been fairly crammed with events. A new world has come into existence, and a world wholly unlike that of our fathers, — unlike it in peace and unlike it in war. It is a world of great intellectual quickening, which has extended until it now touches a vastly larger number of men, in many more countries, than it ever touched before. Not only have the nations been rudely shaken up, but they have been drawn together. Interdependent thought has been carried on, interacting agencies have been at work in widely separated countries and different tongues. The solidarity of the peo-

ples has been developed. Old professions have lost their prominence; new professions have arisen. Science has extended its domains, and superseded authority with bewildering rapidity. The artificial barriers — national, political, social, economical, religious, intellectual — have given way in every direction, and the civilized races of the world are becoming one people, even if a discordant and quarrelsome people. We all of us live more in the present and less in the past than we did thirty years ago; — much less in the past and much more in the present than those who preceded us did fifty years ago. The world as it is may be a very bad and a very vulgar world, — insincere, democratic, disrespectful, dangerous, and altogether hopeless. I do not think it is; but with that thesis I have, here and now, nothing to do. However bad and hopeless, it is nevertheless the world in which our lot was cast, and in which we have had to live, — a bustling, active, nervous world, and one very hard to keep up with. This much all will admit; while I think I may further add, that its most marked characteristic has been an intense mental and physical activity, which, working simultaneously in many tongues, has attempted much and questioned all things.

Now as respects the college preparation we received to fit us to take part in this world's debate. As one goes on in life, especially in modern life, a few conclusions are hammered into us by the hard logic of facts. Among those conclusions, I think I may, without much fear of contradiction, enumerate such practical, common-sense and commonplace precepts as that superficiality is dangerous, as well as contemptible, in that it is apt to invite defeat; or, again, that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well; or, third, that when one is given work to do, it is well to prepare one's self for that specific work, and not to occupy one's time in acquiring information, no matter how innocent or elegant, or generally useful, which has no probable bearing on that work; or, finally, — and this I regard as the greatest of all practical precepts, — that every man

should in life master some one thing, be it great or be it small, so that thereon he may be the highest living authority: that one thing he should know thoroughly.

How did Harvard College prepare me, and my ninety-two classmates of the year 1856, for our work in a life in which we have had these homely precepts brought close to us? In answering the question it is not altogether easy to preserve one's gravity. The college fitted us for this active, bustling, hard-hitting, many-tongued world, caring nothing for authority and little for the past, but full of its living thought and living issues, in dealing with which there was no man who did not stand in pressing and constant need of every possible preparation as respects knowledge and exactitude and thoroughness, — the poor old college prepared us to play our parts in this world by compelling us, directly and indirectly, to devote the best part of our school lives to acquiring a confessedly superficial knowledge of two dead languages.

In regard to the theory of what we call a liberal education, there is, as I understand it, not much room for difference of opinion. There are certain fundamental requirements, without a thorough mastery of which no one can pursue a specialty to advantage. Upon these common fundamentals are grafted the specialties, — the students' electives, as we call them. The man is simply mad, who in these days takes all knowledge for his province. He who professes to do so can only mean that he proposes, in so far as in him lies, to reduce superficiality to a science.

Such is the theory. Now what is the practice? Thirty years ago, as for three centuries before, Greek and Latin were the fundamentals. The grammatical study of two dead languages was the basis of all liberal education. It is still its basis. But, following the theory out, I think all will admit that, as respects the fundamentals, the college training should be compulsory and severe. It should extend through the whole course. No one ought to become a Bachelor of Arts

until, upon these fundamentals, he had passed an examination, the scope and thoroughness of which should set at defiance what is perfectly well defined as the science of cramming. Could the graduates of my time have passed such an examination in Latin and Greek? If they could have done that, I should now see a reason in the course pursued with us. When we were graduated, we should have acquired a training, such as it was; it would have amounted to something; and, having a bearing on the future, it would have been of use in it. But it never was for a moment assumed that we could have passed any such examination. In justice to all, I must admit that no self-deception was indulged in on this point. Not only was the knowledge of our theoretical fundamentals to the last degree superficial, but nothing better was expected. The requirements spoke for themselves; and the subsequent examinations never could have deceived any one who had a proper conception of what real knowledge was.

But in pursuing Greek and Latin we had ignored our mother tongue. We were no more competent to pass a really searching examination in English literature and English composition than in the languages and literature of Greece and Rome. We were college graduates; and yet how many of us could follow out a line of sustained, close thought, expressing ourselves in clear, concise terms? The faculty of doing this should result from a mastery of well selected fundamentals. The difficulty was that the fundamentals were not well selected, and they had never been mastered. They had become a tradition. They were studied no longer as a means, but as an end, — the end being to get into college. Accordingly, thirty years ago there was no real living basis of a Harvard education. Honest, solid foundations were not laid. The superstructure, such as it was, rested upon an empty formula.

The reason of all this I could not understand then, though it is clear enough to me now. I take it to be simply this: The classic tongues were far more remote from our world than they



had been from the world our fathers lived in. They are much more remote from the world of to-day than they were from the world of thirty years ago. The human mind, outside of the cloisters, is occupied with other and more pressing things. Especially is it occupied with a class of thoughts — scientific thoughts — which do not find their nutriment in the remote past. They are not in sympathy with it. Accordingly, the world turns more and more from the classics to those other and living sources, in which alone it finds what it seeks. Students come to college from the hearthstones of the modern world. They have been brought up in the new atmosphere. They are consequently more and more disposed to regard the dead languages as a mere requirement to college admission. This reacts upon the institution. The college does not change, — there is no conservatism I have ever met, so hard, so unreasoning, so impenetrable, as the conservatism of professional educators about their methods, — the college does not change; it only accepts the situation. The routine goes on, but superficiality is accepted as of course; and so thirty years ago, as now, a surface acquaintance with two dead languages was the chief requirement for admission to Harvard; and to acquiring it, years of school life were devoted.

Nor in my time did the mischief end here. On the contrary, it began here. As a slipshod method of training was accepted in those studies to which the greatest prominence was given, the same method was accepted in other studies. The whole standard was lowered. Thirty years ago — I say it after a careful search through my memory — thoroughness of training in any real-life sense of the term was unknown in those branches of college education with which I came in contact. Everything was taught as Latin and Greek were taught. Even now, I do not see how I could have got solid, exhaustive teaching in the class-room, even if I had known enough to want it. A limp superficiality was all pervasive. To the best of my recollection the idea of hard thoroughness was not there. It may be there now. I hope it is.

And here let me define my position on several points, so that I shall be misunderstood only by such as wilfully misunderstand, in order to misrepresent. With such I hold no argument. In the first place I desire to say that I am no believer in that narrow scientific and technological training which now and again we hear extolled. A practical, and too often a mere vulgar, money-making utility seems to be its natural outcome. On the contrary, the whole experience and observation of my life lead me to look with greater admiration, and an envy ever increasing, on the broadened culture which is the true end and aim of the University. On this point I cannot be too explicit; for I should be sorry indeed if anything I might utter were construed into an argument against the most liberal education. There is a considerable period in every man's life, when the best thing he can do is to let his mind soak and tan in the vats of literature. The atmosphere of a university is breathed into the student's system, — it enters by the very pores. But, just as all roads lead to Rome, so I hold there may be a modern road as well as the classic avenue to the goal of a true liberal education. I object to no man's causing his children to approach that goal by the old, the time-honored entrance. On the contrary I will admit that, for those who travel it well, it is the best entrance. But I do ask that the modern entrance should not be closed. Vested interests always look upon a claim for simple recognition as a covert attack on their very existence, and the advocates of an exclusively classic college-education are quick to interpret a desire for modern learning, as a covert attack on dead learning. I have no wish to attack it, except in its spirit of selfish exclusiveness. I do challenge the right of the classicist to longer say that by his path, and by his path only, shall the University be approached. I would not narrow the basis of liberal education; I would broaden it. No longer content with classic sources, I would have the University seek fresh inspiration at the fountains of living thought; for Goethe I hold to be the equal of Sophocles, and

I prefer the philosophy of Montaigne to what seem to me the platitudes of Cicero.

Neither, though venturing on these comparisons, have I any light or disrespectful word to utter of the study of Latin or of Greek, much less of the classic literatures. While recognizing fully the benefit to be derived from a severe training in these mother tongues, I fully appreciate the pleasure those must have who enjoy an easy familiarity with the authors who yet live in them. No one admires — I am not prepared to admit that any one can admire — more than I the subtile, indescribable fineness, both of thought and diction, which a thorough classical education gives to the scholar. Mr. Gladstone is, as Macaulay was, a striking case in point. As much as any one I note and deplore the absence of this literary Tower-stamp in the writings and utterances of many of our own authors and public men. But its absence is not so deplorable as that display of cheap learning which made the American oration of thirty and fifty years ago a national humiliation. Even in its best form it was bedizened with classic tinsel which bespoke the vanity of the half-taught scholar. We no longer admire that sort of thing. But among men of my own generation I do both admire and envy those who I am told make it a daily rule to read a little of Homer or Thucydides, of Horace or Tacitus. I wish I could do the same; and yet I must frankly say I should not do it if I could. Life after all is limited, and I belong enough to the present to feel satisfied that I could employ that little time each day both more enjoyably and more profitably if I should devote it to keeping pace with modern thought, as it finds expression even in the ephemeral pages of the despised review. Do what he will, no man can keep pace with that wonderful modern thought; and if I must choose, — and choose I must, — I would rather learn something daily from the living who are to perish, than daily muse with the immortal dead. Yet for the purpose of my argument I do not for a moment dispute the superiority — I am

ready to say the hopeless, the unattainable superiority — of the classic masterpieces. They are sealed books to me, as they are to at least nineteen out of twenty of the graduates of our colleges; and we can neither affirm nor deny that in them, and in them alone, are to be found the choicest thoughts of the human mind and the most perfect forms of human speech.

All that has nothing to do with the question. We are not living in any ideal world. We are living in this world of to-day; and it is the business of the college to fit men for it. Does she do it? As I have said, my own experience of thirty years ago tells me that she did not do it then. The facts being much the same, I do not see how she can do it now. It seems to me she starts from a radically wrong basis. It is, to use plain language, a basis of fetich worship, in which the real and practical is systematically sacrificed to the ideal and theoretical.

To-day, whether I want to or not, I must speak from individual experience. Indeed, I have no other ground on which to stand. I am not a scholar; I am not an educator; I am not a philosopher; but I submit that in educational matters individual, practical experience is entitled to some weight. Not one man in ten thousand can contribute anything to this discussion in the way of more profound views or deeper insight. Yet any concrete, actual experience, if it be only simply and directly told, may prove a contribution of value, and that contribution we all can bring. An average college graduate, I am here to subject the college theories to the practical test of an experience in the tussle of life. Recurring to the simile with which I began, the wrestler in the games is back at the gymnasium. If he is to talk to any good purpose he must talk of himself, and how he fared in the struggle. It is he who speaks.

I was fitted for college in the usual way. I went to the Latin School; I learned the two grammars by heart; at length I could even puzzle out the simpler classic writings with the aid

of a lexicon, and apply more or less correctly the rules of construction. This, and the other rudiments of what we are pleased to call a liberal education, took five years of my time. I was fortunately fond of reading, and so learned English myself, and with some thoroughness. I say fortunately, for in our preparatory curriculum no place was found for English; being a modern language, it was thought not worth studying, — as our examination papers conclusively showed. We turned English into bad enough Greek, but our thoughts were expressed in even more abominable English. I then went to college, — to Harvard. I have already spoken of the standard of instruction, so far as thoroughness was concerned, then prevailing here. Presently I was graduated, and passed some years in the study of the law. Thus far, as you will see, my course was thoroughly correct. It was the course pursued by a large proportion of all graduates then, and the course pursued by more than a third of them now. Then the War of the Rebellion came, and swept me out of a lawyer's office into a cavalry saddle. Let me say, in passing, that I have always felt under deep personal obligation to the War of the Rebellion. Returning presently to civil life, and not taking kindly to my profession, I endeavored to strike out a new path, and fastened myself, not, as Mr. Emerson recommends, to a star, but to the locomotive-engine. I made for myself what might perhaps be called a specialty in connection with the development of the railroad system. I do not hesitate to say that I have been incapacitated from properly developing my specialty, by the sins of omission and commission incident to my college training. The mischief is done, and so far as I am concerned is irreparable. I am only one more sacrifice to the fetich. But I do not propose to be a silent sacrifice. I am here to-day to put the responsibility for my failure, so far as I have failed, where I think it belongs, — at the door of my preparatory and college education.

Nor has that incapacity, and the consequent failure to which

I have referred, been a mere thing of imagination or sentiment. On the contrary, it has been not only matter-of-fact and real, but to the last degree humiliating. I have not, in following out my specialty, had at my command — nor has it been in my power, placed as I was, to acquire — the ordinary tools which an educated man must have to enable him to work to advantage on the developing problems of modern, scientific life. But on this point I feel that I can, with few words, safely make my appeal to the members of this Society.

Many of you are scientific men; others are literary men; some are professional men. I believe, from your own personal experience, you will bear me out when I say that, with a single exception, there is no modern scientific study which can be thoroughly pursued in any one living language, even with the assistance of all the dead languages that ever were spoken. The researches in the dead languages are indeed carried on through the medium of several living languages. I have admitted there is one exception to this rule. That exception is the law. Lawyers alone, I believe, join with our statesmen in caring nothing for "abroad." Except in its more elevated and theoretical branches, which rarely find their way into our courts, the law is a purely local pursuit. Those who follow it may grow gray in active practice, and yet never have occasion to consult a work in any language but their own. It is not so with medicine or theology or science or art, in any of their numerous branches, or with government, or political economy, or with any other of the whole long list. With the exception of law, I think I might safely challenge any one of you to name a single modern calling, either learned or scientific, in which a worker who is unable to read and write and speak at least German and French, does not stand at a great and always recurring disadvantage. He is without the essential tools of his trade.

The modern languages are thus the avenues to modern life and living thought. Under these circumstances, what was the position of the college towards them thirty years ago? What

is its position to-day? It intervened, and practically said then that its graduates should not acquire those languages at that period when only they could be acquired perfectly and with ease. It occupies the same position still. It did and does this none the less effectually because indirectly. The thing came about, as it still comes about, in this way: The college fixes the requirements for admission to its course. The schools and the academies adapt themselves to those requirements. The business of those preparatory schools is to get the boys through their examinations, not as a means, but as an end. They are therefore all organized on one plan. To that plan there is no exception; nor practically can there be any exception. The requirements for admission are such that the labor of preparation occupies fully the boy's study hours. He is not overworked, perhaps, but when his tasks are done he has no more leisure than is good for play; and you cannot take a healthy boy the moment he leaves school and set him down before tutors in German and French. If you do, he will soon cease to be a healthy boy; and he will not learn German or French. Over-education is a crime against youth. But Harvard College says: "We require such and such things for admission to our course." First and most emphasized among them are Latin and Greek. The academies accordingly teach Latin and Greek; and they teach it in the way to secure admission to the college. Hence, because of this action of the college, the schools do not exist in this country in which my children can learn what my experience tells me it is all essential they should know. They cannot both be fitted for college and taught the modern languages. And when I say "taught the modern languages," I mean taught them in the world's sense of the word, and not in the college sense of it, as practised both in my time and now. And here let me not be misunderstood, and confronted with examination papers. I am talking of really knowing something. I do not want my children to get a smattering knowledge of French and of Ger-

man, such a knowledge as was and now is given to boys of Latin and Greek; but I do want them to be taught to write and to speak those languages, as well as to read them, — in a word, so to master them that they will thereafter be tools always ready to the hand. This requires labor. It is a thing which cannot be picked up by the wayside, except in the countries where the languages are spoken. If academies in America are to instruct in this way, they must devote themselves to it. But the college requires all that they can well undertake to do. The college absolutely insists on Latin and Greek.

Latin I will not stop to contend over. That is a small matter. Not only is it a comparatively simple language, but, apart from its literature, — for which I cannot myself profess to have any great admiration, — it has its modern uses. Not only is it directly the mother tongue of all southwestern Europe, but it has by common consent been adopted in scientific nomenclature. Hence, there are reasons why the educated man should have at least an elementary knowledge of Latin. That knowledge also can be acquired with no great degree of labor. To master the language would be another matter; but in these days few think of mastering it. How many students during the last thirty years have graduated from Harvard who could read Horace and Tacitus and Juvenal, as numbers now read Goethe and Mommsen and Heine? If there have been ten, I do not believe there have been a score. This it is to acquire a language! A knowledge of its rudiments is a wholly different thing; and with a knowledge of the rudiments of Latin as a requirement for admission to college I am not here to quarrel. Not so Greek. The study of Greek, and I speak from the unmistakable result of my own individual experience in active life, as well as from that of a long-continued family experience which I shall presently give, — the study of Greek in the way it is traditionally insisted upon, as the chief requirement to entering college, is a positive educational wrong. It has already



wrought great individual and general injury, and is now working it. It has been productive of no compensating advantage. It is a superstition.

But before going further I wish to emphasize the limitations under which I make this statement. I would not be misunderstood. I am speaking not at all of Greek really studied and lovingly learned. Of that there cannot well be two opinions. I have already said that it is the basis of the finest scholarship. I have in mind only the Greek traditionally insisted upon as the chief requirement to entering College, — the Greek learned under compulsion by nine men at least out of each ten who are graduated. It is that quarter-acquired knowledge, and that only, of which I insist that it is a superstition, and educational wrong. Nor can it ever be anything else. It is a mere penalty on going to college.

I am told that when thoroughly studied Greek becomes a language delightfully easy to learn. I do not know how this may be; but I do know that when learned as a college requirement it is most difficult, — far more difficult than Latin. Unlike Latin, also, Greek, partially acquired, has no modern uses. Not only is it a dead tongue, but it bears no immediate relation to any living speech or literature of value. Like all rich dialects, it is full of anomalies; and accordingly its grammar is the delight of grammarians, and the despair of every one else. When I was fitted for college, the study of Greek took up at least one half of the last three years devoted to active preparation. In memory it looms up now, through the long vista of years, as the one gigantic nightmare of youth, — and no more profitable than nightmares are wont to be. Other school-day tasks sink into insignificance beside it. When we entered college we had all of us the merest superficial knowledge of the language, — a knowledge measured by the ability to read at sight a portion of Xenophon, a little of Herodotus, and a book or two of the Iliad. It was just enough to enable us to meet the requirements of the examination. In

all these respects, my inquiries lead me to conclude that what was true then is even more true now. In the vast majority of cases, this study of Greek was looked upon by parent and student as a mere college requirement; and the instructor taught it as such. It was never supposed for an instant that it would be followed up. On the contrary, if it was thought of at all, instead of rather taken as a matter of course, it was thought of very much as a similar amount of physical exercise with dumb-bells or parallel-bars might be thought of, — as a thing to be done as best it might, and there an end. As soon as possible after entering college the study was abandoned forever, and the little that had been acquired faded rapidly away from the average student's mind. I have now forgotten the Greek alphabet, and I cannot read all the Greek characters if I open my Homer. Such has been the be-all and the end-all of the tremendous labor of my schooldays.

But I now come to what in plain language I cannot but call the educational cant of this subject. I am told that I ignore the severe intellectual training I got in learning the Greek grammar, and in subsequently applying its rules; that my memory then received an education which, turned since to other matters, has proved invaluable to me; that accumulated experience shows that this training can be got equally well in no other way; that, beyond all this, even my slight contact with the Greek masterpieces has left with me a subtile but unmistakable residuum, impalpable perhaps, but still there, and very precious; that, in a word, I am what is called an educated man, which, but for my early contact with Greek, I would not be.

It was Dr. Johnson, I believe, who once said, "Let us free our minds from cant;" and all this, with not undue bluntness be it said, is unadulterated nonsense. The fact that it has been and will yet be a thousand times repeated, cannot make it anything else. In the first place, I very confidently submit, there is no more mental training in learning the Greek

grammar by heart than in learning by heart any other equally difficult and, to a boy, unintelligible book. As a mere work of memorizing, Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" would be at least as good. In the next place, unintelligent memorizing is at best a most questionable educational method. For one, I utterly disbelieve in it. It never did me anything but harm; and learning by heart the Greek grammar did me harm,—a great deal of harm. While I was doing it, the observing and reflective powers lay dormant; indeed, they were systematically suppressed. Their exercise was resented as a sort of impertinence. We boys stood up and repeated long rules, and yet longer lists of exceptions to them, and it was drilled into us that we were not there to reason, but to rattle off something written on the blackboard of our minds. The faculties we had in common with the raven were thus cultivated at the expense of that apprehension and reason which, Shakespeare tells us, makes man like the angels and God. I infer this memory-culture is yet in vogue; for only yesterday, as I sat at the Commencement table with one of the younger and more active of the professors of the college, he told me that he had no difficulty with his students in making them commit to memory; they were well trained in that. But when he called on them to observe and infer, then his troubles began. They had never been led in such a path. It was the old, old story,—a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong. There are very few of us who were educated a generation ago who cannot now stand up and glibly recite long extracts from the Greek grammar; sorry am I to say it, but these extracts are with most of us all we have left pertaining to that language. But, as not many of us followed the stage as a calling, this power of rapidly learning a part has proved but of questionable value. It is true, the habit of correct verbal memorizing will probably enable its fortunate possessor to get off many an apt quotation at the dinner-table, and far be it from me to detract from that much longed-for accomplishment; but, after all, the college professes

to fit its students for life rather than for its dinner-tables, and in life a happy knack at quotations is in the long run an indifferent substitute for the power of close observation, and correct inference from it. To be able to follow out a line of exact, sustained thought to a given result is invaluable. It is a weapon which all who would engage successfully in the struggle of modern life must sooner or later acquire; and they are apt to succeed just in the degree they acquire it. In my youth we were supposed to acquire it through the blundering application of rules of grammar in a language we did not understand. The training which ought to have been obtained in physics and mathematics was thus sought for long, and in vain, in Greek. That it was not found, is small cause for wonder now. And so, looking back from this standpoint of thirty years later, and thinking of the game which has now been lost or won, I silently listen to that talk about "the severe intellectual training," in which a parrot-like memorizing did its best to degrade boys to the level of learned dogs.

Finally, I come to the great impalpable-essence-and-precious-residuum theory, — the theory that a knowledge of Greek grammar, and the having puzzled through the *Anabasis* and three books of the *Iliad*, infuses into the boy's nature the imperceptible spirit of Greek literature, which will appear in the results of his subsequent work, just as manure, spread upon a field, appears in the crop which that field bears. But to produce results on a field, manure must be laboriously worked into its soil, and made a part of it; and only when it is so worked in, and does become a part of it, will it produce its result. You cannot haul manure up and down and across a field, cutting the ground into deep ruts with the wheels of your cart, while the soil just gets a smell of what is in the cart, and then expect to get a crop. Yet even that is more than we did, and are doing, with Greek. We trundle a single wheelbarrow-load of Greek up and down and across the boy's mind; and then we clasp our hands, and cant about a subtile fineness and

impalpable but very precious residuum! All we have in fact done is to teach the boy to mistake means for ends, and to make a system of superficiality.

Nor in this matter am I speaking unadvisedly or thoughtlessly. My own experience I have given. For want of a rational training in youth I cannot do my chosen work in life thoroughly. The necessary tools are not at my command; it is too late for me to acquire them, or to learn familiarly to handle them; the mischief is done. I have also referred to my family experience. Just as the wrestler in the gymnasium, after describing how he had himself fared in the games, might, in support of his conclusions, refer to his father and grandfather, who, likewise trained in the gymnasium, had been noted athletes in their days, so I, coming here and speaking from practical experience, and practical experience alone, must cite that experience where I best can find it. I can find it best at home. So I appeal to a family experience which extends through nearly a century and a half. It is worth giving, and very much to the point.

I do not think I exceed proper limits when I say that the family of which I am a member has, for more than a hundred years, held its own with the average of Harvard graduates. Indeed, those representing it through three consecutive generations were rather looked upon as typical scholars in politics. They all studied Greek as a requirement to admission to college. In their subsequent lives they were busy men. Without being purely literary men, they wrote a great deal; indeed, the pen was rarely out of their hands. They all occupied high public position. They mixed much with the world. Now let us see what their actual experience in life was: how far did their college requirements fit them for it? Did they fit them any better than they have fitted me? I begin with John Adams.

John Adams graduated in the class of 1755, — a hundred and twenty-eight years ago. We have his own testimony on

the practical value to him of his Greek learning, expressed in an unguarded moment, and in a rather comical way. I shall give it presently. Meanwhile, after graduation John Adams was a busy man as a school-teacher, a lawyer and a patriot, until at the age of forty-two he suddenly found himself on the Atlantic, accredited to France as the representative of the struggling American colonies. French was not a requirement in the Harvard College of the last century, even to the modest extent in which it is a requirement now. Greek was. But they did not talk Greek in the diplomatic circles of Europe then any more than they now talk it in the Harvard recitation-rooms; and in advising John Adams of his appointment, James Lovell had expressed the hope that his correspondent would not allow his "partial defect in the language" to stand in the way of his acceptance. He did not; but at forty-two, with his country's destiny on his shoulders, John Adams stoutly took his grammar and phrase-book in hand, and set himself to master the rudiments of that living tongue which was the first and most necessary tool for use in the work before him. What he afterwards went through — the anxiety, the humiliation, the nervous wear and tear, the disadvantage under which he struggled and bore up — might best be appreciated by some one who had fought for his life with one arm disabled. I shall not attempt to describe it.

But in the eighteenth century the ordinary educated man set a higher value on dead learning than even our college professors do now; and, in spite of his experience, no one thought more of it than did John Adams. So when in his closing years he founded an academy, he especially provided, bowing low before the fetich, that "a schoolmaster should be procured, learned in the Greek and Roman languages, and, if thought advisable, the Hebrew; not to make learned Hebricians, but to teach such young men as choose to learn it the Hebrew alphabet, the rudiments of the Hebrew grammar, and the use of the Hebrew grammar and lexicon, that in after life they

may pursue the study to what extent they please." Instead of taking a step forward, the old man actually took one backwards. And he went on to develop the following happy educational theory, which if properly considered in the light of the systematic superficiality of thirty years ago, to which I have already alluded, shows how our methods had then deteriorated. What was taught was at least to be taught thoroughly; and, as I have confessed, I have forgotten the Greek letters. "I hope," he wrote, "the future masters will not think me too presumptuous, if I advise them to begin their lessons in Greek and Hebrew by compelling their pupils to write over and over again copies of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets, in all their variety of characters, until they are perfect masters of those alphabets and characters. This will be as good an exercise in chirography as any they can use, and will stamp those alphabets and characters upon their tender minds and vigorous memories so deeply that the impression will never wear out, and will enable them at any period of their future lives to study those languages to any extent with great ease."

This was fetich-worship, pure and simple. It was written in the year 1822. But practice is sometimes better than theory, and so I turn back a little to see how John Adams's practice squared with his theory. In his own case, did the stamping of those Greek characters upon his tender mind and vigorous memory enable him at a later period "to study that language to any extent with great ease"? Let us see. On the 9th of July, 1813, the hard political wrangles of their two lives being over, and in the midst of the second war with Great Britain, I find John Adams thus writing to Thomas Jefferson, — and I must confess to very much preferring John Adams in his easy letter-writing undress, to John Adams on his dead-learning stilts; he seems a wiser, a more genuine man. He is answering a letter from Jefferson, who had in the shades of Monticello been reviving his Greek: —

"Lord! Lord! what can I do with so much Greek? When I was

of your age, young man, that is, seven or eight years ago [he was then nearly seventy-nine, and his correspondent a little over seventy], I felt a kind of pang of affection for one of the flames of my youth, and again paid my addresses to Isocrates and Dionysius Halicarnassensis, etc., etc., etc. I collected all my lexicons and grammars, and sat down to *Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων*. In this way I amused myself for some time, but I found that if I looked a word to-day, in less than a week I had to look it again. It was to little better purpose than writing letters on a pail of water."

This certainly is not much like studying Greek "to any extent with great ease." But I have not done with John Adams yet. A year and one week later I find him again writing to Jefferson. In the interval, Jefferson seems to have read Plato, sending at last to John Adams his final impressions of that philosopher. To this letter, on the 16th of July, 1814, his correspondent replies as follows: —

"I am very glad you have seriously read Plato, and still more rejoiced to find that your reflections upon him so perfectly harmonize with mine. Some thirty years ago I took upon me the severe task of going through all his works. With the help of two Latin translations, and one English and one French translation, and comparing some of the most remarkable passages with the Greek, I labored through the tedious toil. My disappointment was very great, my astonishment was greater, and my disgust was shocking. Two things only did I learn from him. First, that Franklin's ideas of exempting husbandmen and mariners, etc., from the depredations of war were borrowed from him; and, second, that sneezing is a cure for the hiccough. Accordingly, I have cured myself and all my friends of that provoking disorder, for thirty years, with a pinch of snuff."<sup>1</sup>

As a sufficiently cross-examined witness on the subject of Greek literature, I think that John Adams may now quit the stand.

More fortunate than his father, John Quincy Adams passed a large part of his youth in Europe. There, in the easy

<sup>1</sup> John Adams's Works, vol. x. pp. 49, 102.



way a boy does, he picked up those living languages so inestimably valuable to him in that diplomatic career which subsequently was no less useful to his country than it was honorable to himself. Presently he came home, and, acquiring his modicum of Greek, graduated at Harvard in the class of 1788. Then followed his long public life, stretching through more than half a century. I would, for the sake of my argument, give much could I correctly weigh what he owed during that public life to the living languages he had picked up in Europe, against what he owed to the requirements of Harvard College. Minister at the Hague, at Berlin, and at St. Petersburg, negotiator at Ghent, his knowledge of living tongues enabled him to initiate the diplomatic movement which restored peace to his country. At St. Petersburg he at least was not tongue-tied. Returning to America, for eight years he was the head of the State Department, and probably the single member of the Government who, without the assistance of an interpreter, could hold ready intercourse with the representatives of other lands. Meanwhile, so far as Greek was concerned, I know he never read it; and I suspect that, labor-loving as he was, he never could read it. He could with the aid of a lexicon puzzle out a phrase when it came in his way, but from original sources he knew little or nothing of Greek literature. It would have been better for him if he had also dropped his Latin. I have already said that the display of cheap learning made the American oration of fifty years ago a national humiliation; it was bedizened with classic tinsel. In this respect John Quincy Adams shared to the full in the affectation of his time. Ready, terse, quick at parry and thrust in his native tongue, speaking plainly and directly to the point, with all his resources at his immediate command, — I think I may say he never met his equal in debate. Yet when in lectures and formal orations he mounted the classic high-horse and modelled himself on Demosthenes and Cicero, he became a poor imitator. As an imitator he was as bad as

Chatham. More could not be said. That much he owed to Harvard College, and its little Latin and less Greek.

But I must pass on to the third generation. Fortunate like his father, Charles Francis Adams spent some years of his boyhood in Europe, and in many countries of Europe; so that at six years old he could talk, as a child talks, in no less than six different tongues. Greek was not among them. Returning to America he too fitted for Harvard, and in so doing made a bad exchange; for he easily got rid forever of the German speech, and with much labor acquired in place thereof the regulation allowance of Greek. He was graduated in the class of 1825. After graduation, having more leisure than his father or grandfather, — that is, not being compelled to devote himself to an exacting profession, — he, as the phrase goes, “kept up his Greek.” That is, he occupied himself daily, for an hour or so, with the Greek masterpieces, puzzling them laboriously out with the aid of grammar and lexicon. He never acquired any real familiarity with the tongue; for I well remember that when my turn at the treadmill came, and he undertook to aid me at my lessons, we were very much in the case of a boy who was nearly blind, being led by a man who could only very indistinctly see. Still he for years “kept up his Greek,” and was on the examining-committee of the College. And now, looking back, I realize at what a sad cost to himself he did this; for in doing it he lost the step of his own time. Had he passed those same morning hours in keeping himself abreast with modern thought in those living tongues he had acquired in his infancy, and allowed his classics to rest undisturbed on his library shelves, he would have been a wiser, a happier, and a far more useful man. But modern thought (apart from politics), modern science, modern romance and modern poetry soon ceased to have any charm for him. Nevertheless, he did not wholly lose the more useful lessons of his infancy. For years, as I have said, he officiated on the Greek examining-committee of the College; but at last the time came

when his country needed a representative on a board of international arbitration. Then he laid his lexicon and grammar aside forever, and the almost forgotten French of his boyhood was worth more — a thousand-fold more — to him and his country than all the concentrated results of the wasted leisure hours of his maturer life.

I come now to the fourth generation, cutting deep into the second century. My father had four sons. We were all brought up on strict traditional principles, the special family experience being carefully ignored. We went to the Latin schools, and there wasted the best hours of our youth over the Greek grammar, — hours during which we might have been talking French and German, — and presently we went to Harvard. When we got there we dropped Greek, and with one voice we have all deplored the irreparable loss we sustained in being forced to devote to it that time and labor which, otherwise applied, would have produced results now invaluable. One brother, since a Professor at Harvard, whose work here was not without results, wiser than the rest, went abroad after graduation, and devoted two years to there supplying, imperfectly and with great labor, the more glaring deficiencies of his college training. Since then the post-graduate knowledge thus acquired has been to him an indispensable tool of his trade. Sharing in the modern contempt for a superficial learning, he has not wasted his time over dead languages which he could not hope thoroughly to master. Another of the four, now a Fellow of the University, has certainly made no effort to keep up his Greek. When, however, his sons came forward, a fifth generation to fit for college, looking back over his own experience as he watched them at their studies, his eyes were opened. Then in language certainly not lacking in picturesque vigor, but rather profane than either classical or sacred, he expressed to me his mature judgment. While he looked with inexpressible self-contempt on that worthless smatter of the classics which gave him the title of an educated

man, he declared that his inability to follow modern thought in other tongues, or to meet strangers on the neutral ground of speech, had been and was to him a source of life-long regret and the keenest mortification. In obedience to the stern behest of his *Alma Mater* he then proceeded to sacrifice his children to the fetich.

My own experience I have partly given. It is unnecessary for me to repeat it. Speaking in all moderation, I will merely say that, so far as I am able to judge, the large amount of my youthful time devoted to the study of Greek, both in my school and college life, was time as nearly as possible thrown away. I suppose I did get some discipline out of that boyish martyrdom. I should have got some discipline out of an equal number of hours spent on a treadmill. But the discipline I got for the mind out of the study of Greek, so far as it was carried and in the way in which it was pursued in my case, was very much such discipline as would be acquired on the treadmill for the body. I do not think it was any higher or any more intelligent. Yet I studied Greek with patient fidelity; and there are not many modern graduates who can say, as I can, that they have, not without enjoyment, read the Iliad through in the original from its first line to its last. But I read it exactly as some German student, toiling at English, might read Shakespeare or Milton. As he slowly puzzled them out, an hundred lines in an hour, what insight would he get into the pathos, the music and the majesty of Lear or of the Paradise Lost? What insight did I get into Homer? And then they actually tell me to my face that unconsciously, through the medium of a grammar, a lexicon and Felton's Greek Reader, the subtile spirit of a dead literature was and is infused into a parcel of boys!

So much for what my *Alma Mater* gave me. In these days of repeating-rifles, she sent me and my classmates out into the strife equipped with shields and swords and javelins. We were to grapple with living questions through the medium of

dead languages. It seems to me I have heard, somewhere else, of a child's cry for bread being answered with a stone. But on this point I do not like publicly to tell the whole of my own experience. It has been too bitter, too humiliating. Representing American educated men in the world's industrial gatherings, I have occupied a position of confessed inferiority. I have not been the equal of my peers. It was the world's Congress of to-day, and Latin and Greek were not current money there.

Such is a family and individual experience covering a century and a half. With that experience behind me, I have sons of my own coming forward. I want them to go to college, — to Harvard College; but I do not want them to go there by the path their fathers trod. It seems to me that four generations ought to suffice. Neither is my case a single one. I am, on the contrary, one of a large class in the community, very many of whom are more imbued than I with the scientific and thorough spirit of the age. As respects our children, the problem before us is a simple one, and yet one very difficult of practical solution. We want no more classical veneer. Whether on furniture or in education, we do not admire veneer. Either impart to our children the dead languages thoroughly or the living languages thoroughly; or, better yet, let them take their choice of either. This is just what the colleges do not do. On the contrary, Harvard stands directly in the way of what a century-and-a-half's experience tells me is all important.

I have already referred to the way in which this comes about. It was Polonius, I think, who suggested to his agent that he should "by indirections find directions out;" and that is what Harvard does with our youth. Economically speaking, the bounty or premium put upon Greek is so heavy that it amounts to a prohibition of other things. To fit a boy for college is now no small task. The doing so is a specialty in itself; for the standard has been raised, and the list of require-

ments increased. Candidates for admission to the Freshman Class must know a little of a good many things. To acquire this multifarious fractional knowledge takes a great deal of time. To impart it in just the proper quantities, and in such a way that it shall all be on hand and ready for exhibition on a given day, affords the teachers of the academies, as I am given to understand, all the occupation they crave. The requirements being thus manifold, it is a case of *expressio unius, exclusio alterius*. Accordingly, one thing crowding another out, there does not exist, so far as I am able to learn, a single school in the country which will at the same time prepare my sons for college, and for what I, by long and hard experience, perfectly well know to be the life actually before them. The simple fact is that the college faculty tell me that I do not know what a man really needs to enable him to do the educated work of modern life well; and I, who for twenty years have been engaged in that work, can only reply that the members of the faculty are laboring under a serious misapprehension as to what life is. It is a something made up, not of theories, but of facts, — and of confoundedly hard facts, at that.

The situation has its comical side, and is readily suggestive of sarcasm. Unfortunately, it has its serious side also. It is not so very easy to elude the fetich. Of course, where means are ample it is possible to improvise an academy through private instruction. But the contact with his equals in the class and on the playground is the best education a boy ever gets, — better than a rudimentary knowledge of Greek, even. According to my observation, to surround children with tutors at home is simply to emasculate them. Then, again, they can be sent to Europe and to the schools there. But that way danger lies. For myself, whatever my children are not, I want them to be Americans. If they go to Europe, I must go with them; but as the people of modern Europe do not speak Greek and Latin, in which learned tongues alone I am theoretic-

cally at home, a sojourn of some years in a foreign academic town, though as a remedy it may be effective, yet at the time of life at which those of my generation have now unhappily arrived, it partakes also of the heroic.

Such is the dilemma in which I find myself placed. Such is the common dilemma in which all those are placed who see and feel the world as I have seen and felt it. We are the modernists and a majority; but in the eyes of the classicists we are, I fear, a vulgar and contemptible majority. Yet I cannot believe that this singular condition of affairs will last a great while longer. The measure of reform seems very simple and wholly reasonable. The modernist does not ask to have German and French substituted for Greek and Latin as the basis of all college education. I know that he is usually represented as seeking this change, and of course I shall be represented as seeking it. This, however, is merely one of those wilful misrepresentations to which the more disingenuous defenders of vested interests always have recourse. So far from demanding that Greek and Latin be driven out and French and German substituted for them, we do not even ask that the modern languages be put on an equal footing with the classic. Recognizing, as every intelligent modernist must, that the command of several languages, besides that which is native to him, is essential to a liberally educated man, — recognizing this fundamental fact, those who feel as I feel would by no means desire that students should be admitted to the college who could pass their examinations in German and French, instead of Greek and Latin. We are willing — at least I am willing — to concede a preference, and a great preference, to the dead over the living, to the classic over the modern. All I would ask, would be that the preference afforded to the one should no longer, as now, amount to the practical prohibition of the other. I should not even wish for instance, that, on the present basis of real familiarity, Greek should count against French and German combined as less than three counts

against one. This, it seems to me, should afford a sufficient bounty on Greek. In other words, the modernist asks of the college to change its requirements for admission only in this wise: Let it say to the student who presents himself, "In what languages, besides Latin and English, — those are required of all, — in what other languages — Hebrew, Greek, German, French, Spanish, or Italian — will you be examined?" If the student replies, "In Greek," so be it, — let him be examined in that alone; and if, as now, he can stumble through a few lines of Xenophon or Homer, and render some simple English sentences into questionable Greek, let that suffice. As respects languages, let him be pronounced fitted for a college course. If, however, instead of offering himself in the classic, he offers himself in the modern tongues, then, though no mercy be shown him, let him at least no longer be turned contemptuously away from the college doors; but, instead of the poor, quarter-knowledge, ancient and modern, now required, let him be permitted to pass such an examination as will show that he has so mastered two languages besides his own that he can go forward in his studies, using them as working tools. Remember that, though we are modernists, we are yet your fellow-students; and so we pray you to let us and our children sit at the common table of the *Alma Mater*, even though it be below the salt.

That an elementary knowledge of one dead language should count as equal to a thorough familiarity with two living languages ought, I submit, to be accepted as a sufficient educational bounty on the former, and brand of inferiority on the latter. The classicist should in reason ask for no more. He should not insist that his is the only, as well as the royal, road to salvation. Meanwhile the modernist would be perfectly satisfied with recognition on any terms. He most certainly does not wish to see modern languages, or indeed any other subject, taught in preparatory schools as Greek was taught in them when we were there, or as it is taught



in them now, — I mean as a mere college requirement. Believing, as the scientific modernist does, that a little knowledge is a contemptible thing, he does not wish to see the old standard of examinations in the dead languages any longer applied to the living. On the contrary, we wish to see the standard raised; and we know perfectly well that it can be raised. If a youth wants to enter college on the least possible basis of solid acquirement, by all means let Greek, as it is, be left open for him. If, however, he takes the modern languages, let him do so with the distinct understanding that he must master those languages. After he enters the examination-room no word should be uttered except in the language in which he is there to be examined.

Consider now, for a moment, what would be the effect on the educational machinery of the country of this change in the college requirements. The modern, scientific, thorough spirit would at once assert itself. Up to this time it has, by that tradition and authority which are so powerful in things educational, been held in subjection. Remove the absolute protection which hitherto has been and now is accorded to Greek, and many a parent would at once look about for a modern, as opposed to a classical, academy. To meet the college requirements, that academy would have to be one in which no English word would be spoken in the higher recitation-rooms. Every school exercise would be conducted by American masters proficient in the foreign tongues. The scholars would have to learn languages by hearing them and talking them. The natural law of supply and demand would then assert itself. The demand is now a purely artificial one, but the supply of Greek and Latin, such as it is, comes in response to it. Once let a thorough knowledge of German and French and Spanish be as good tender at the college-door as a fractional knowledge of either of the first two of those languages and of Greek now is, and the academies would supply that thorough knowledge also. If the present academies did not supply it, other and better academies would.

But I have heard it argued that in order to attain the ends I have in view no such radical change as that involved in dropping Greek from the list of college requirements is at all necessary. The experience of Montaigne is cited, told in Montaigne's charming language. It is then asserted that the compulsory study of Greek has not been discontinued in foreign colleges; and yet, as we all know, the students of those colleges have an ever increasing mastery of the living tongues. I do not propose to enter into this branch of the discussion. I do not profess to be informed as to what the universities of other lands have done. As I have repeatedly said, I have nothing of value to contribute to this debate except practical, individual experience. So in answer to the objections I have just stated, I hold it sufficient for my purpose to reply that we have to deal with America, and not with Germany or France or Great Britain. The educational and social conditions are not the same here as in those countries. Our home-life is different, our schools are different; wealth is otherwise distributed; the machinery for special instruction which is found there cannot be found here. However it may be in England or in Prussia, however it may hereafter be in this country, our children cannot now acquire foreign languages, living or dead, in the easy, natural way, — in the way in which Montaigne acquired them. The appliances do not exist. Consequently there is not room in one and the same preparatory school for both the modernist and the classicist. Under existing conditions the process of acquiring the languages is too slow and laborious; the one crowds out the other. In the university it is not so. The two could from the beginning there move side by side; under the elective system they do so already, during the last three years of the course. I would put no obstacle in the way of the scholar whose tastes turn to classic studies. On the contrary, I would afford him every assistance, and no longer clog and encumber his progress by tying him to a whole class-room of others whose tastes run in opposite

directions, or in no direction at all. Indeed, it is curious to think how much the standard of classic requirements might be raised, were not the better scholars weighted down by the presence of the worse. But while welcoming the classicist, why not also welcome the modernist? Why longer say, "By this one avenue only shall the college be approached"? Why this narrow, this intolerant spirit? After all, the university is a part of the machinery of the world in which we live; and, as I have already more than once intimated, the college student does not get very far into that world, after leaving these classic shades, before he is made to realize that it is a world of facts, and very hard facts. As one of those facts, I would like to suggest that there are but two, or at most three, languages spoken on these continents in which ours is the dominant race. There is a saying that a living dog is better than a dead lion; and the Spanish tongue is what the Greek is not, — a very considerable American fact.

Here I might stop; and here, perhaps, I ought to stop. I am, however, unwilling to do so without a closing word on one other topic. For the sake of my argument, and to avoid making a false issue, I have in everything I have said, as between the classic and modern languages, fully yielded the preference to the former. I have treated a mastery of the living tongues simply as an indispensable tool of trade, or medium of speech and thought. It was a thing which the scholar, the professional man and the scientist of to-day must have, or be unequal to his work. I have made no reference to the accumulated literary wealth of the modern tongues, much less compared their masterpieces with those of Greece or Rome. Yet I would not have it supposed that in taking this view of the matter I express my full belief. On the contrary, I most shrewdly suspect that there is in what are called the educated classes, both in this country and in Europe, a very considerable amount of affectation and credulity in regard to the Greek and

Latin masterpieces. That is jealously prized as part of the body of the classics, which if published to-day, in German or French or English, would not excite a passing notice. There are immortal poets, whose immortality, my mature judgment tells me, is wholly due to the fact that they lived two thousand years ago. Even a dead language cannot veil extreme tenuity of thought and fancy; and, as we have seen, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were in their day at a loss to account for the reputation even of Plato.

In any event, this thing I hold to be indisputable: of those who study the classic languages, not one in a hundred ever acquires that familiarity with them which enables him to judge whether a given literary composition is a masterpiece or not. Take your own case and your own language for instance. For myself, I can freely say that it has required thirty years of incessant and intelligent practice, with eye and ear and tongue and pen, to give me that ready mastery of the English language which enables me thoroughly to appreciate the more subtle beauties of the English literature. I fancy that it is in our native tongue alone, or in some tongue in which we have acquired as perfect a facility as we have in our native tongue, that we ever detect those finer shades of meaning, that happier choice of words, that more delicate flavor of style, which alone reveal the master. Many men here, for instance, who cannot speak French or German fluently, can read French and German authors more readily than any living man can read Greek, or than any, outside of a few college professors, can read Latin; yet they cannot see in the French or German masterpieces what those can see there who are to the language born. The familiarity, therefore, with the classic tongues which would enable a man to appreciate the classic literatures in any real sense of the term is a thing which cannot be generally imparted. Even if the beauties which are claimed to be there are there, they must perforce remain concealed from all, save a very few, outside of the class of professional scholars.

But are those transcendent beauties really there? I greatly doubt. I shall never be able to judge for myself, for a mere lexicon-and-grammar acquaintance with a language I hold to be no acquaintance at all. But we can judge a little of what we do not know by what we do know, and I find it harder and harder to believe that in practical richness the Greek literature equals the German, or the Latin the French. Leaving practical richness aside, are there in the classic masterpieces any bits of literary workmanship which take precedence of what may be picked out of Shakspeare and Milton and Bunyan and Clarendon and Addison and Swift and Goldsmith and Gray and Burke and Gibbon and Shelley and Burns and Macaulay and Carlyle and Hawthorne and Thackeray and Tennyson? If there are any such transcendent bits, I can only say that our finest scholars have failed most lamentably in their attempts at rendering them into English.

For myself, I cannot but think that the species of sanctity which has now, ever since the revival of learning, hedged the classics, is destined soon to disappear. Yet it is still strong; indeed, it is about the only patent of nobility which has survived the levelling tendencies of the age. A man who at some period of his life has studied Latin and Greek is an educated man; he who has not done so is only a self-taught man. Not to have studied Latin, irrespective of any present ability to read it, is accounted a thing to be ashamed of; to be unable to speak French is merely an inconvenience. I submit that it is high time this superstition should come to an end. I do not profess to speak with authority, but I have certainly mixed somewhat with the world, its labors and its literatures, in several countries, through a third of a century; and I am free to say, that, whether viewed as a thing of use, as an accomplishment, as a source of pleasure, or as a mental training, I would rather myself be familiar with the German tongue and its literature than be equally familiar with the Greek. I would unhesitatingly make the same choice for my child. What

I have said of German as compared with Greek, I will also say of French as compared with Latin. On this last point I have no question. Authority and superstition apart, I am indeed unable to see how an intelligent man, having any considerable acquaintance with the two literatures, can, as respects either richness or beauty, compare the Latin with the French; while as a worldly accomplishment, were it not for fetich-worship, in these days of universal travel the man would be properly regarded as out of his mind who preferred to be able to read the odes of Horace, rather than to feel at home in the accepted neutral language of all refined society. This view of the case is not yet taken by the colleges.

"The slaves of custom and established mode,  
With pack-horse constancy we keep the road,  
Crookèd or straight, through quags or thorny dells,  
True to the jingling of our leader's bells."

And yet I am practical and of this world enough to believe, that in a utilitarian and scientific age the living will not forever be sacrificed to the dead. The worship even of the classical fetich draweth to a close; and I shall hold that I was not myself sacrificed wholly in vain, if what I have said here may contribute to so shaping the policy of Harvard that it will not much longer use its prodigious influence towards indirectly closing for its students, as it closed for me, the avenues to modern life and the fountains of living thought.

